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Round Robin

Dorothy E. Smith

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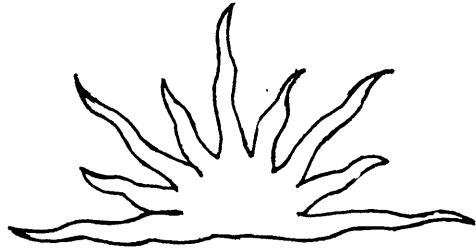
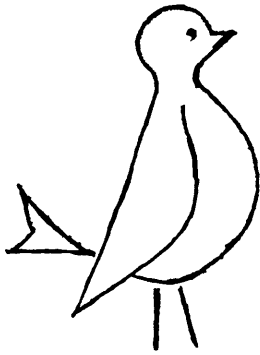
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ROUND ROBIN

Dorothy E. Smith, Editor

Western Michigan University

The following letters are in response to the one written by Dr. Sara Swickard for the Fall issue of *Reading Horizons*. Dr. Swickard's letter was commenting on an article in a national magazine which suggested that babies might be taught to read.

Dear Editor:

Dr. Swickard's comment about reading among the "nursery school set" which appears in the Fall, 1963 issue of *Reading Horizons*, called to mind comments made by an eminent psychologist a few years ago.

Dr. B. F. Skinner of Harvard University in an appearance on Western Michigan University's campus as a Distinguished Scholar in 1960 pointed out the advantages of teaching machines. He commented that he felt that we, as a society, were wasting the best years of our children's lives. These years, he contended, were the ones between three and five. His thesis was that children in this age bracket could be taught basic elementary school subjects through simplified teaching machine techniques and that bright children could be efficient readers long before the assumed age for the "beginning steps in reading."

I have some real doubts about the efficacy of such an approach. However, there is little reason to believe that in our search for extending the total years of educational potential, the American educational

system may some day not only look toward more and more work beyond the basic college degree, but we may well look toward the other end of life's continuum . . . those untouched pre-school years.

Katherine Butler,
Department of Psychology
Western Michigan University

Dear Editor:

I'm not an educator so it follows that neither am I an expert. It seems clear to me, though, that there are some children who can be taught to read very early. I taught my two children to read when they were about four years old, and after reading the Journal article I regret that I didn't start earlier.

(Name withheld by request)
Kenilworth, Illinois

EDITOR'S REACTION: Neither of the above letters is in direct opposition to Dr. Swickard's viewpoint, since she was objecting to the thesis that one-and two-year olds can be taught to read. Is not the definition of reading the center of the whole issue?